

The Apology

Background

- Greek Trials:
 - No lawyers, accusers and defendants argue for themselves.
 - Jury of 500 randomly selected Athenians.
 - Verdict by plurality vote.
 - In case of a guilty verdict, both the accusers and the defendant propose a punishment.
 - Then the jury selects one of them as being appropriate.

Two sorts of Accusers

- First the recent accusers, Meletus and company who have taken him to court.
- Second there are accusers who have long seen Socrates as a bad actor, a rogue sophist and have spoken against him, publically and privately for his entire life.
- Socrates addresses these latter accusers first.
- (18b) skip to (20c)

Defense Against old Slander

- What are these old accusers accusing Socrates of?
- What motives does he ascribe to his accusers?
- Why does he say they have these motives against him?
- How does he defend the actions that have turned powerful people against him.
- What claim does Socrates make about his own wisdom?
- Do you think his defense helps his case?

First Defense Against Meletus

- Then he answers the current accusers who charge him with corrupting the youth.
- First defense: He asks Meletus who it is that actually improves the youth, and not getting a sensible answer accuses Meletus of bringing frivolous charges. (24d-25c)
 - Socrates: “Who is it that improves the youth?”
 - Meletus responds, the laws.
 - But who? Asks Socrates.
 - These jurymen.
 - All of them? Or just some?
 - All of them.
 - OK, what about the audience, do they improve the young?
 - Yes, they do too.

First Defense Against Meletus

- What about the members of Council?
- They do too.
- What about members of the assembly?
- They do too.
- So all Athenian improve the youth except for me, I alone corrupt them, is that true?
- That is “most definitely what I mean.”
- “It would be a happy state of affairs if only one person corrupted our youth, while the others improved them.”
- Does this apply to horses too, that all improve them and only one corrupts them? Or is quite the contrary true? That only one improves them, namely the trainer, whereas the majority corrupt them?
- It is clear Meletus, “that you have given no thought to the subjects about which you bring me to trial.”

Second Defense Against Meletus

- Second Defense: he argues that he would have no motive to corrupt the youth. (25c-26b)
 - Tell us, Meletus, “is it better for a man to live among good or wicked fellow citizens? [...] Do not the wicked do some harm to those who are ever closest to them, whereas good people benefit them?”
 - Certainly
 - “And does the man exist who would rather be harmed than benefited by his associates?”
 - Of course not.
 - And you accuse me of corrupting the youth of Athens deliberately?
 - Yes.

Second Defense Against Meletus

- Have I then reached “such a pitch of ignorance that that I do not realize this, namely that if I make one of my associates wicked I run the risk of being harmed by him? [...] I do not believe you Meletus, and I do not think anyone else will. Either I do not corrupt the young, or if I do, it is unwillingly, and you are lying in either case.”

Third Defense Against Meletus

- Meletus accuses Socrates of not believing in the gods at all, and of claiming that the sun is stone and the moon earth, instead of gods. But Socrates replies that of course he believes in the gods. (26b-28b)
 - “My dear Meletus, do you think you are prosecuting Anaxagoras?” These are his theories that any man can buy in a booklet for a Drachma and any educated man would laugh at me if I claimed they were my own.
 - Further, answer me, Meletus, “does any man believe in spiritual activities and not in spirits?”
 - No one.

Third Defense Against Meletus

- Now you have sworn in your deposition that I believe in spiritual things and teach about them. Do we not believe spirits to be either either gods or the children of gods?
- Of course.
- So either I believe in spirits that are gods, but I don't believe in gods, or I believe in the children of gods, but not the gods themselves!
- “You cannot be believed, Meletus, even, I think, by yourself. The man appears to me, men of Athens, highly insolent and uncontrolled. [...] There is no way in which you could persuade anyone of even small intelligence that it is possible for one and the same man to believe in spiritual, but not also in divine things, and then again for that same man to believe neither in spirits nor in gods nor in heroes.”

Socrates and Athens

- Next Socrates describes at length why he must keep doing as he does, and why this is not harmful, but beneficial to the city and citizens of Athens. (28)
 - Why does Socrates not feel ashamed, nor fearful at having lead a life which may now condemn him to death?
 - How does Socrates claim to be wiser than other men?
 - Because of this, what will be his course of action upon being released?
 - Why cannot Meletus and Anytus truly harm Socrates?

The Verdict

- Next Socrates talks about his why, if he feels his role is so vital for Athens, he has never sought public office.
 - His “divine sign,” which dissuades him from wrong courses of action, long ago kept him from seeking a public life.
 - “Be sure, men of Athens, that if I had long ago attempted to take part in politics, I should have died long ago, and benefited neither you nor myself. Do not be angry with me for speaking the truth. [...] A man who really fights for justice must lead a private, not a public, life if he is to survive for even a short time.
- I shall give you great proofs of this, not words but what you esteem, deeds.

The Verdict

- Socrates brings two examples of his involvement in public life that endangered him.
 - First, while serving as a member of the council when there was great public pressure to try ten generals who failed, in the battle of Arginusae (406 BC) to rescue survivors from the wreckage. Socrates was the only member of the council to vote against it.
 - Second, during the short-lived dictatorial oligarchy after Athens' defeat in 404 BC Socrates was asked along with 4 others to summon a certain Leon from Salamis to be executed. Socrates alone refused, and says he would have died for it had the oligarchy not fallen soon after.

The Verdict

- Finally Socrates says he will not beg and plead for mercy, instead it is his role to “teach and persuade” the jury.
- The jury renders its verdict “GUILTY.”

The Punishment

- Meletus asks for a punishment of death.
- As proscribed Socrates gets the opportunity to propose an alternate punishment, perhaps in the hopes that his life will be spared for some lesser punishment.
 - “Clearly it should be a punishment I deserve.”
 - What do I deserve for being a man who forgoes all the pleasures of possessions and wealth in order to better my fellow man?
 - “Nothing is more suitable gentlemen, than for such a man to be fed in the Prytaneum.”

The Punishment

- Then Socrates relents a little.
- “I am not accustomed to think that I deserve any penalty. If I had money, I would assess the penalty at the amount I could pay, for that would not hurt me, but I have none, unless you are willing to set the penalty at the amount I can pay, and perhaps I could pay you one mina of silver. So that is my assessment.”
- Then he is given word that his friends in the court, Plato, Crito, Critobulus and Apollodorus will stand surety for a fine of thirty minas, so that is his final assessment.

The Punishment

- The jury votes, and assesses the punishment of death.
 - “I was convicted because I lacked not words but boldness and shamelessness and the willingness to say to you what you would most gladly have heard from me, lamentations and tears and my saying and doing many things that I say are unworthy of me but that you are accustomed to hear from others. [...] I would much rather die after this kind of defense than live after making the other kind.”
 - Final exhortations: (41d)